Bulwark

I logged the run the way I always do, like a confession and a ritual.

01/29/2026

Ami was the destination. *0.4.* The kind of space that smiles at you with all its teeth. Blood Raiders in the area, the local warning net murmuring like a fever dream in the background. Kernite in the rocks. Money in the math. A quiet little plan that only looks quiet from far away.

The Bulwark

I undocked from **Chaven 1.0**—Air Laboratories hanging there like a clean, bright lie—and the **Bulwark** slid out into the lane with all the urgency of a glacier. Procurer-class. A barge that does not hurry because it cannot. I had built it the way you build a bunker when you know the weather hates you: tanked out, thick plates and stubborn systems, a ship designed to *endure*. I even had a little pride in it.

Hobgoblin light-attack drones in the bay. Angry little knives on a leash.

02:20 Amarr Time

02:20 Amarr time, I set the route. Five jumps. Not long enough to feel like a voyage, but long enough to get careless if you let your mind wander. The engines droned. The stars did their indifferent burn. Every gate flash was a hard cut to a new scene, the same cold lighting with different furniture.

In high-sec you learn bad habits. You start to believe in rules like they are physics. You start to believe that if you do everything right—align, check local, watch d-scan, stay sharp—then the universe owes you a clean passage.

Low-sec teaches you what the universe thinks of that.

Crossing Into Ami

By the time I crossed into **Ami**, the air in my pod felt thinner. The system had a weight to it, the way a room changes when someone walks in behind you and doesn't speak. The overview looked normal, which is how danger likes to present itself. Normal until it is sudden.

I remember thinking: *Just get to the belt. Get the lasers on the rock. Keep the drones ready. In and out. Simple.*

That was the lie I told myself.

The Targeting Alarm

Then the targeting alarm hit.

A clean, sharp sound that goes straight past your ears and into your spine. A lock on my hull. Not an accident. Not some bored customs ship. The kind of lock that comes with intent.

The first name I saw was **Alexis Starbuck (Wise-Wire)**.

The first second after you realize you're being hunted is always denial. Your brain trying to bargain with reality. *Maybe they're passing through. Maybe they're locking for a scan. Maybe it's nothing.*

It Was Something

It was something.

I started the motions before my thoughts caught up. Align out. Find a celestial. Anything. My ship was already turning, slow as regret. I punched the warp command anyway, because sometimes hope is the only thing left to do.

The Bulwark tried.

The Bulwark failed.

A hard clamp closed around my ship like a fist. The warp drive spooled and then choked, the sound in my pod shifting into a strained whine that made my teeth ache. I was stuck in the open, pinned in place by a physics trick and someone else's patience.

The Second Name

And then the second name appeared on grid like the closing of a door: **Katherine Drakoon (White Mithril)**.

Two pilots. Two sets of decisions converging on one slow, stubborn mining barge. It felt less like a random encounter and more like a practiced move—one of them holding me down, the other arriving to make sure the math ended the right way.

My drones came out on instinct.

"Hobgoblins, engage."

Five little heat signatures spilled into space and went hunting like they were angry at the whole universe. They bit at Alexis first—at the ship that had me snared—and for a breath it felt like I could still bully my way through it. Like my tank might hold. Like "tanked out" meant "safe."

The Fire Deepened

Then the incoming fire deepened.

Not a single hit. Not one mistake I could correct. Just steady pressure applied by people who knew exactly how long it takes a mining barge to die. My shields folded first, the way they always do when the numbers stop being yours and start being theirs. The armor alarms lit. The hull trembled. Structural integrity warnings stacked up like prayers that no one listens to.

I tried everything you try when you know you're losing. Overheat. Cycle. Pulse the repair. Anything to buy seconds. The kind of seconds you can turn into survival if the universe gives you a gap.

The universe did not.

Alexis held me in place—warp interdiction like a hand around the throat—while Katherine's presence turned the fight from bad to terminal. A division of labor. Efficient. Human. Worse than any pirate NPC script because it was *intentional*. Because it was *personal* in the only way space allows: someone chose that I would be the wreck they made today.

My ship's tank—my careful fittings, my planning, my confidence—turned out to be a story I told myself to feel competent in a place that does not care.

The Breaking Point

And then the Bulwark stopped being a ship.

There's a moment when a hull breaks that feels almost quiet, like the vacuum itself is surprised. A flash of light, a blossom of debris, the sudden absence where your home just was. Systems going dark in a cascade, everything shrinking down to the smallest, truest version of your life: *get out*.

My pod kicked free.

I didn't think, I just moved—warp command again, fingers like sparks. This time the drive caught, and the stars stretched into lines and then snapped back into points, and I was gone.

Safe, technically.

Alive, certainly.

The Aftermath

But I left a wreck behind me that felt like a tombstone with my name scratched into it.

In the aftermath, when the adrenaline drains out and leaves you shaking in a quiet corner of space, you start replaying it. You start asking the questions that can't change anything.

If I had docked up.

If I had waited.

If I had brought scouts.

If I had flown something faster.

If I had respected low-sec the way it demands to be respected.

But the truth is simpler, and it's worse because it doesn't let you hide.

I flew into a place where predators live, and I brought them a slow ship full of certainty.

The Blood Raiders were in the area, sure. But it wasn't the Raiders that took my ship. It was **Alexis Starbuck (Wise-Wire)** and **Katherine Drakoon (White Mithril)**—two capsuleers who moved like they'd done it before, like they'd rehearsed the shape of it. One to stop the escape. One to make the ending inevitable.

The Sea

People like to talk about New Eden like it's an economy, or a battlefield, or a game of numbers. Like it's something you can solve if you get smart enough.

But nights like this remind me what it really is.

It's a sea.

And sometimes you are the ship.

Sometimes you are the salvage.

And sometimes you are just the story drifting out after the wreck, broadcasting on broken signals.

I named that barge **Bulwark** because I wanted it to mean something. I wanted it to be a promise: that I could build a wall against the dark.

Tonight, low-sec reminded me that walls are just shapes people make before the flood comes.

I made it out in my pod.

The Bulwark didn't.

And Alexis and Katherine—names that will stick in my head longer than they deserve—taught me the lesson the Expanse always circles back to, dressed up in different uniforms and different airlocks:

Space doesn't kill you because it hates you.

It kills you because it's indifferent.

And the people living in it? They're the ones who decide whether you get mercy.